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# **Understanding legislator experiences of family-friendly working practices in political institutions**

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## *Abstract*

Family-friendly (FF) working practices in political institutions have attracted scant attention from scholars arguably reflecting the scarcity of their implementation. For the first time, using a survey of legislators and qualitative interviews, we examine how satisfied elected members of two new legislatures are with FF working practices. We offer four possible explanations - parenthood, age of legislator, sex, and the distance between each constituency and the legislature - for the variation in satisfaction. Our findings suggest that both being a woman and a greater constituency-legislature distance exerted significant negative effects on a legislator's satisfaction with FF working practices. In contrast, those legislators aged over 60 were significantly more likely to be satisfied with FF working practices in the new legislatures. We conclude by outlining future research avenues for comparative scholars of gender and politics interested in the effectiveness and resilience of FF working practices, in particular highlighting the importance of looking beyond the parent-child caring relationship to other caring and domestic obligations.

# **Understanding legislator experiences of family-friendly working practices in political institutions**

## **Introduction**

The impact of familial commitments on the ability of an individual to work has become an increasing focus of employment policy and practice over the past fifty years (Hogg and Harker 1992). Changes in the nature of the workforce, primarily the increased numbers of women seeking work, have altered the assumptions underlying the existing ‘separate spheres’ model of work-life balance which was reliant on the presence of women in the home (Barnett 1999; Office for National Statistics 2013).<sup>i</sup> Despite the prominence of these ideas, existing scholarship finds that the majority of employees of both sexes have little access to family-friendly working practices designed to adjust occupational norms to these underlying changes (Budd and Mumford 2006). Occupationally, politics is no exception to this rule, and Marian Sawyer notes that ‘it is only in the last twenty years that there has been real discussion, let alone action, on how public life might be changed to accommodate family responsibilities. Prior to this, women’s family responsibilities were construed as insuperable barriers to equal participation in public life’ (2000, p.369).

Globally, there are few examples of political institutions that formally commit themselves to family-friendly (FF) working practices (Dahlerup 1988; Ross 2002).<sup>ii</sup> Crucially, such a lack of commitment is likely to have gendered implications - women are still more likely than men to be responsible for childcare and other domestic duties, thus increasing the tension between their working and domestic lives (Kan et al. 2011). Scholars of political recruitment have noted the ways in which such responsibilities are likely to affect the political ambitions

and recruitment of women to legislatures, even if, crucially, this is based on perceptions of incompatibility as opposed to an actual inability to combine the two (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Lawless and Fox 2005; Lawless 2012). The introduction of FF working practices by political institutions may disrupt these norms, providing greater compatibility for both sexes between pursuing politics as a career and traditional caring roles and can be seen as part of a broader move towards gender sensitivity and wider equality in political life.<sup>iii</sup> Existing analyses have suggested that newly-formed institutions that have adopted FF working practices have seen women feel more ‘at home’ in these spaces than in their older equivalents (Mackay and McAllister 2012, p.731). However, we know little of whether sitting politicians themselves feel that family-friendly practices are working and actually affecting their lived experience of being a politician. Additionally, if they are seen to be successful, we know nothing of whether this is equally true of all legislators regardless of sex, age, parental status, or other confounding factors.

In this paper, we provide the first findings of this kind to the gender and politics literature. We focus on the FF practices in place in two ‘new’ legislatures, the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament, fifteen years after their initial implementation. We combine primary survey data and interviews of sitting politicians in the two legislatures to assess whether they perceive the implementation of FF policies has been successful or not. Following this, we offer four explanations as to how these perceptions might differ amongst politicians, dependent on 1) whether they are parents, 2) on their sex 3) on their age, or 4) by the proximity of their constituency to the legislature in which they sit. We then model the relative impact of these variables, and develop findings that underline the importance of FF policies beyond those focused on parents and children. We close with a number of recommendations and directions for future comparative research.

## **Family-friendly working practices and politics**

Recent scholarly work has considered the extent to which political legislatures are institutionally sexist, either in their formal or informal workings (Puwar 2004; Lovenduski 2005; Krook and Mackay 2011; Lovenduski 2012a, 2012b; Kenny 2013).<sup>iv</sup> A feminist institutionalist theory has emerged over the past decade that seeks to explain institutional norms and change by placing a feminist lens over institutional theory at large (Kenny 2013). However, little scholarship explicitly refers to FF working practices in this context. Rather, the focus is often on the broader difficulties, perceived and actual, of combining the duties of an elected political occupation with family obligations and caring duties (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Cheng and Tavits 2011; Lawless 2012). This is often related to further issues of political representation and access. For example, in evidence to a recent UK House of Commons enquiry into sitting hours at Westminster (an area of London where the parliament meets), Sarah Childs notes,

“Importantly, advocating family friendly hours is not about MPs working less when they are in Westminster, but rationalizing their work in ways that rebalance work/family life, so as to both improve the conditions of current MPs, and to signal that the House is open to a diverse group of Members, not just those who either do not have caring responsibilities or who have that care undertaken by others” (House of Commons Procedure Committee 2012).

It is notable that ‘family-friendly’ is a phrase often used interchangeably with ‘woman-friendly’ (Ross 2002).<sup>v</sup> Clearly, individual men can struggle as much as women to combine

their political duties with family life. However, this focus on the situation of women reflects an assumption that when a man is involved in elected politics, there will be a woman taking care of domestic matters (Mackay 2001; Lyon and Woodward 2004). As such, these policies and practices have been framed as a means of correcting this historical injustice (Sawer 2000). Julie Ballington introduces the idea of a ‘gender sensitive’ parliament, noting that the ‘operational culture’ of a parliament is an important element of this and notes that this can include changes to the sitting hours of the legislature in addition to the introduction of childcare facilities within the legislature (Ballington 2009). As such, sex and parenthood are pivotal delineations in the consideration of the workings of FF practices and policies.

The lack of academic attention given to the subject is likely due to the fact that FF practices are the exception rather than a rule in political institutions, leaving scholars with only a small number of cases to examine.<sup>vi</sup> Although we struggled to find a reliable source detailing the global extent of family-friendly practices in political institutions, we find mention of specific instances of them. For example, the Swedish parliament (the *Riksdag*) opened a day-care facility for the children of parliamentarians in 1999 (Engstrom 2009). Similarly, the UK Parliament at Westminster has a crèche where MPs can leave their children during the working day.<sup>vii</sup> The broad focus on sitting hours and childcare provisions reflects the main pressures on legislators with family responsibilities – those of time and caring resources, similar to those seen in other high-level professions (Fagan 2001). Restrictions on sitting hours could be seen to make a legislature more family-friendly by allowing politicians to return home at a time closer to traditional (‘nine-to-five’) jobs, as opposed to being forced to remain within the legislature in case of a late-night vote. However, these restrictions may also have an adverse effect on those politicians whose constituencies are a long distance from the location of the legislature in which they sit. In countries such as the UK or United States,

countries with strong traditions of constituency-based service from politicians (Fenno 1978; Searing 1985), politicians are expected to return to their constituency, wherever it may be, on an almost weekly basis (Norton 1994). The argument espoused in the UK, for example, is that ‘people who live in constituencies that are a long distance away from London...desire to work longer hours but for a shorter week’ (House of Commons Procedure Committee 2012). Put simply, these politicians would prefer to work longer, ‘non-FF’ hours, but be able to return to their constituency earlier in the week. Clearly, the location of a legislator’s constituency might affect their perceptions of the effectiveness of FF practices such as alterations to sitting hours.

We can locate the present study, and potential future research into FF working practices within broader bodies of research, highlighting the ways in which this is a topic of clear relevance to scholars of gender and politics. Firstly, they clearly affect and shape institutional norms, increasingly studied by feminist institutionalist scholars (Mackay et al. 2010). We can understand the introduction of family-friendly practices from multiple institutionalist perspectives. Within a framework of feminist historical institutionalism, we consider how these formal institutional changes either persist or disappear over time, why this occurs, and how these shifts play out in a gendered way and with gendered effects (Waylen 2009). Additionally, drawing on post-structural and discursive institutionalist ideas of non-formal institutions, we can better appreciate the relationship between formal institutional frameworks such as the legal commitment to family-friendly working practices, and the non-formal ‘rules of the game’ that also shape the lives of actors within these spaces, such as the general acceptance of certain working hours or compromises between work and family (Hay 2005; Mackay, Kenny, and Chappell 2010; Moon 2013; Bacchi and Rönnblom 2014; Chappell and Waylen 2014). That is, do formal institutional changes necessarily result in the

changing of broader social, non-formal, institutions that they are arguably brought in to mediate and alter (Raymond et al. 2014)? If not, how can we best understand the persistence of existing non-formal institutions which are often detrimental to gender equality, broadly defined?

Secondly, they are likely to affect the dynamics of supply and demand highlighted by multiple scholars over the past two decades, in addition to the broader climate in which these dynamics exist (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Krook 2009). Thirdly, building on the recent work of Campbell and Childs, it could be argued that FF working practices may help to rectify representational imbalances brought about by existing discriminatory norms, and as such they can be related to arguments from justice (Phillips 1995; Campbell and Childs Forthcoming). Additionally, as Sawer notes, others have suggested that a more consensual style of politics could arise as a result of including more women who develop such a style as a result of caring for their family (2000, p.365). Despite broadly supporting these arguments, and the overall idea that FF working practices are arguably of obvious interest to gender and politics scholars, the present article will not outline them in greater detail. Our intention here, for the first time, is to examine sitting legislators' perceptions of FF policies in two new legislatures, the findings of which will inform *how* gender and politics scholars could study FF policies in future research.

### **The Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament – the recognition of equality in institutional design**



Fifteen years ago, the devolved legislatures of Scotland and Wales both opened their doors for the first time and saw record numbers of women elected into public office. Located in Holyrood, Edinburgh and Cardiff, South Wales, respectively, the so-called ‘family-friendly’ working practices of the new institutions were perceived to treat gender as a core consideration of institutional design, with gender equality ‘in with the bricks’ (Chaney et al. 2007, p.53). A core plank of the ‘new politics’ heralded by the establishment of the new institutions was a series of measures designed to embed gender equality into the design of the legislatures themselves, including ‘the creation of equalities machinery (equal opportunities committees in the legislatures and equality units in government), the introduction of family-friendly sitting hours, commitments to ‘mainstream’ equality, including gender equality in policy making, and new legal responsibilities to promote equality of opportunity (including the powerful statutory equality duty in Wales)’ (Mackay and McAllister 2012, p.734). The Welsh statutory equality duty (SED) came about as the result of significant lobbying on the part of various women’s groups as well as other equality movements (Chaney 2004). Similarly, in Scotland, an Equal Opportunities Committee was founded to monitor the implementation of ‘measures to make parliamentary arrangements equally attractive to men and women’ (Arter 2004, p.126) and to mainstream equalities concerns into the workings of the Parliament (Forman 2002). Table 1 one outlines examples of the types of policies pursued in the new devolved legislatures. How do these policies compare to those seen elsewhere in the UK, in both the public and private sectors? Under the Employment Act 2002, parents have the right to request flexible working following a period of uninterrupted service with an employer. Existing evidence suggests that this is taken up more widely by public sector employees, and that larger employers are better able to accommodate such arrangements than smaller organizations.<sup>viii</sup> However, it should be noted that the most common form of flexible working is part-time work, something that will affect the earnings of the employee involved.

This is distinct from the kind of arrangements undertaken by the devolved legislatures, such as a three-day legislative week, which will not reduce the take-home pay of politicians. Flexible working around school term dates does happen in other UK industries, but is not mandated as in the case of the devolved legislatures. As in the case of the other policies offered by the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly, such as carer's policies or salary sacrifice for childcare vouchers, many of these are provided at the discretion of the employer, although employees do have certain rights to flexible working for family reasons under the terms of the Employment Act 2002 and the Human Rights Act 1998. However, the devolved legislatures are unusual in offering these proactively rather than reactively.

#### Insert Table 1

Much research has suggested that the equality-aware nature of the institutions has allowed women to feel 'at home', and to pursue a legislative agenda which foregrounds women's issues in a way that may not be possible in an older, traditional legislature (McAllister 2000; Chaney, Mackay, and McAllister 2007; Mackay and McAllister 2012). Valentina Bold quotes Susan Stewart who recalls that;

“A lot of the MSPs, when they were taking their oath, had their children in the gallery, so it had a less formal feel to it than the parliament we were all used to: Westminster. Right from the start it signalled, “This is a family-friendly parliament. It's going to be a parliament that represents all Scotland and both men and women”” (Bold 2007, p.209).

It is clear that a pre-determined effort was made to make the new legislatures more hospitable to women and other traditionally under-represented groups who might have been deterred by the seemingly hostile nature of Westminster politics, the sole previously existing option for ambitious Scottish and Welsh politicians looking to enter a national-level legislature (Lovenduski 2005). The question remains as to whether or not the implementation of these FF practices has been successful. One possible method of assessing this is to look at the numbers of women present in both legislatures across their fifteen year existence. Based on this, the evidence is mixed, with initial gains in the numbers of women giving way to slight drops in the past five years (Mackay and McAllister 2012). However, although this might suggest that more women could be coming forward to stand for office in the devolved legislatures, it obscures the importance of candidate selection procedures and other confounding measures in ensuring that more women were elected in both Scotland and Wales (Russell et al. 2002; Kenny 2013).

The devolved institutions differ in the ways in which the scope of their power is defined. The Scottish Parliament is able to legislate in any area that has not been listed as a 'reserved matter' in Schedule 5 of the Government of Scotland Act 1998. Conversely, the Welsh Assembly has been given 20 broad policy 'subjects' under which it is able to legislate, with any areas not listed within these subjects being non-devolved areas. By way of example, neither legislature is able to legislate on foreign policy, constitutional arrangements, or immigration, these areas being controlled by Westminster. However, both bodies can legislate on, for example, education, healthcare provision, and transport policy. A further consideration is the increase in the legislative powers afforded to both devolved legislatures by the Westminster parliament. The initial powers of both legislatures were laid out in parliamentary legislation in 1998, with the areas that both bodies were able to legislate on

detailed within. In both the Scottish and Welsh case, these powers of legislation have increased following the initial implementation of the Act, resulting in these legislatures having greater political influence in a broad sense.<sup>ix</sup> The impact of these changes may well have affected both legislature's commitment and ability to ensure that family-friendly practices are implemented in the intended way. This is something we consider throughout our analysis.

To understand differences in legislators' perceptions of the success of FF practices in the devolved assemblies, we hypothesise four key influences. Firstly, we would expect satisfaction to vary by status of parenthood. That is, legislators who have children of dependent age and those who do not may hold different perceptions of the effectiveness of family-friendly working practices. From existing evidence, a comparison of the percentage of members with children across the Welsh Assembly, Scottish Parliament and the House of Commons suggests that lower percentage of women are parents than men in the latter than in the two 'new' legislatures (Campbell and Childs, forthcoming). On the surface level, this implies that the devolved legislatures are more hospitable environments for mothers relative to Westminster where this is true of their male colleagues (however, overall, a higher percentage of women at Westminster are mothers compared to their Scottish counterparts). Yet, these figures offer little insight into the actual lived experiences of parents in either institution, and provide us with no idea as to whether legislators feel that FF working practices make it easier to combine parenthood and politics. We directly address this issue using our survey of legislators in this paper. Secondly, for the reasons noted above, we expect satisfaction to differ along the lines of sex - women legislators may hold different perceptions of the effectiveness of family-friendly working practices as their male colleagues. Thirdly, we hypothesise that older legislators are more likely to view any legislative equality measures as

successful and effective given the longstanding problems in older institutions at both a local and a national level. Finally, we expect the location of a legislator's constituency to affect their satisfaction with FF working practices. Legislators may hold different perceptions of the effectiveness of family-friendly working practices regardless of the distance between the legislature and their constituency.

## **Data and Methods**

Our main data source is an individual-level dataset which includes all members of the Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament ( $n=188$ ). This data was collected using both primary and secondary sources. Firstly, we conducted a survey of sitting politicians in both legislatures. The survey consisted of 32 items that broadly addressed issues relating to the experiences of the legislators whilst holding elected office in addition to personal and demographic-focused questions. All legislators were sent a paper survey in the mail in addition to being given the option of completing an online version. The response rate was 34 per cent.<sup>x</sup> This is comparable to other similar length surveys of political elites which have response rates of around 36 per cent (Maestas et al. 2003). Our responses are broadly representative of the two legislatures, both in terms of sex and party affiliation.<sup>xi</sup> Women represent 44.7 per cent of our sample.<sup>xii</sup> Combined, the full population of both legislatures comprises 38 per cent women, 2.1 per cent members from minority ethnic backgrounds, and 58 per cent of the combined legislature membership is made up of parents of children of all ages. We could not find data on the average age of Welsh Assembly members, but the average age of MSPs is 50 years. Considering the partisan make-up of our sample, 40 per cent of respondents were from the Labour party which compares to 35.6 per cent across the two institutions, while 16.9 per cent of the sample were from the Conservative party compared to 15.4%. Moreover, 45.9 per cent

of our sample from the Scottish Parliament is affiliated to the Scottish National Party which compares to 53.9% in the Parliament, while 21.4 per cent of Welsh Assembly respondents were from Plaid Cymru compared to 18.3 per cent in the actual Assembly.<sup>xiii</sup> Combined, the full population of both legislatures comprises 38 per cent women, 2.1 per cent members from minority ethnic backgrounds, and 58 per cent of the combined legislature membership is made up of parents of children of all ages. We could not find data on the average age of Welsh Assembly members, but the average age of MSPs is 50 years.

Secondly, we utilised various online sources such as official and personal websites to collect data on the parental status of all members of the devolved legislatures, specifically whether they had children or not, and if so, how many. We also collated and then merged aggregate data, including electoral information and socio-demographic data through the census, to the individual dataset. To gauge a deeper insight into legislators' experiences and perceptions of FF policies, we also supplement the quantitative data with information from eight anonymous semi-structured interviews with legislators in the two institutions conducted either in person or via telephone depending on their availability.<sup>xiv</sup>

### *Key Variables*

In our survey of legislators we asked the following question on the implementation of FF policies which is the focus of this paper: 'Do you agree that devolved assemblies have successfully implemented FF working hours?' This is measured across five categories on an ordinal scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.<sup>xv</sup> As noted above, we seek to explain the differences in legislators' perceptions of the success of FF practices in the devolved assemblies through four key factors. Both sex and age 60 plus are binary variables derived

from the survey responses. Parenthood is also a binary variable and simply indicates whether the legislator has children of dependent age or not. Put simply, the variable is a useful measure of how feasible it is to combine the caring duties associated with children with the professional obligations of an elected political position. It is also derived from survey responses and supplemented by online information through personal and party websites. Finally, we consider the effect of constituency location on legislator satisfaction with FF working practices.<sup>xvi</sup> Here we derive a variable that takes account of the vast differences in distance. Using Wales as an example, we took the observed distance of each Assembly member and subtracted the median distance in Wales. This created an individual distance measure where a positive value specifies a longer travel than the median Assembly member while a negative value indicates a shorter travel distance. We did the same for Scotland.

Our examination of sitting politicians' perceptions of FF practices across the two legislatures takes place in two parts. Firstly, we provide a descriptive overview of the survey data and supplement these findings with semi-structured interviews of legislators. Secondly, we use an ordinal logistic regression model to assess which of the hypothesised influences explain the variation in legislators' experiences of FF working practices in the two institutions. The problems associated with a small sample size compromises our ability to address other possible influences or control for other factors, but we are keen to emphasise that future research could develop this. However, for the purposes of the present study, we only test the relationships for those key predictors hypothesised above.

### **Are FF working practices effective?**

Figure 1 provides a descriptive overview of legislators' assessment of the effectiveness of FF practices by parenthood (having children of dependent age), sex, age 60 or above and the distance (above and below the median distance) from a legislators' constituency to the legislature. The descriptive statistics are derived from our sample of legislators.

Insert Figure 1

*Does having children of dependent age influence legislators' evaluation of the effectiveness of family-friendly practices?*

Although there is little comparable existing research focused on political institutions, it stands to reason that having children of caring age (under 18 years old) will affect individual-level opinions regarding the effectiveness of the family-friendly working practices in place within a legislature. Parents are more likely to not only be aware of such practices than non-parents, but also more likely to seek, and feel, the benefit of their successful implementation or otherwise. Figure 1 provides some support for the contention that parents will view the effectiveness of FF policies differently to their colleagues without children. Amongst our sample respondents from both legislatures, 62 per cent of childless legislators agreed that FF working hours had been successfully implemented compared to just over 42 per cent of those with children of dependent age. These sentiments were reflected in our interviews. One Labour woman legislator said 'in terms of being able to get home to do what I want to do, and family life and all that sort of thing, it's quite difficult to combine politics with that. It's just become a way of life. I always try to keep a Sunday free for the children and things, but



you quite often have things that encroach on a Sunday, which is inevitable I suppose.’ In terms of whether they thought they had got the balance between work and family about right, a Labour woman AM responded ‘yes, because I have no dependent children.’

There was a sense among our interviewees that recent increases in the powers of both legislatures had resulted in a weakening of the commitment to FF working hours.<sup>xvii</sup> In addition to the above, a Liberal Democrat male legislator noted that ‘at the very beginning we had a standing order that all meetings had to be finished by 6 o’clock... but (FF working hours) are getting more difficult to hold onto, because now it’s a law-making body. It means if you’re passing through a law, you cannot necessarily stop at 6 o’clock. So it is showing, you know, a bit of a strain, the family friendly hours because of that.” A further male Liberal Democrat legislator concurred with this; ‘FF working hours have really taken a bit of a back seat to the reality of managing a law making assembly with only 60 members which means we have to put huge amounts of time into it. So, you know, it’s a problem.’ This raises the possibility that the initial impact of the FF practices may be under threat. In a sense, the broad success and increased power of the new legislatures have put their unique ability to commit to FF working practices under threat. This further brings into question whether, globally, institutions that initially seem ‘family-friendly’, particularly ‘woman-friendly’, will remain so.<sup>xviii</sup>

*Does sex affect legislators’ perceptions of the effectiveness of family-friendly policies?*

Focusing on parenthood alone obscures the existence of caring duties that occur outside of the parent-child relationship, duties that are more often than not borne by women (Mackay 2001). Addressing whether men and women report differing levels of satisfaction with FF

working practices ensures that any specifically gendered patterns of response are not lost in our analysis. Figure one suggests that women sitting politicians across both legislatures were less likely than men to express agreement that FF practices had been successfully implemented. Of those who felt that FF policies had been implemented effectively, less than 30 per cent were women. 63 per cent of those legislators who disagreed were women. In total, more than 60 per cent of all the women respondents in our sample expressed dissatisfaction with the effectiveness FF practices. Our interviews provided a mixed bag of evidence regarding sexed perceptions of FF practices. For example, one male legislator said; “I think we all have to make compromises if we’re going to do this type of job...Providing your family are prepared to compromise, that’s fine. It’s where you have problems where the family won’t. Politics is a bit like show business. Marriages and relationships can suffer as a result of that.” A similar note of acceptance, of emphasising the importance of individual-level decisions regarding the FF nature of the job, was struck by a woman MSP who said ‘it’s up to each individual how much time and effort they put into their work, in this job, as in any other job. So, I’m not sure there’s much the institution itself could do to change.’ In contrast, another woman MSP explicitly highlighted gendered social roles in this context, stating ‘No, I’m a woman. I feel guilty all the time.’ Combining the descriptive statistics with this interview material raises the possibility that women are less likely to be satisfied with FF practices than their male colleagues, but are perhaps unwilling to voice this or indeed, do not perceive it in the gendered terms that appear more stark across the statistical findings.

*Are older legislators more likely to perceive that family friendly policies have been more effective than younger colleagues?*

Older legislators (those 60 or over) are hypothesised to perceive the implementation of family friendly policies and practices as being more effective than younger colleagues. This partly reflects the political experiences faced by this cohort, seeking election and being involved in representative local party politics in an era when the established traditional culture of a legislature was not questioned and there was an inbuilt expectation for women in particular to combine the duties of political and family life. This is borne out by our sample: more than 60 per cent of those aged 60 or over had previously been a local councillor, with one respondent having been a Westminster MP and a local councillor. Additionally, this cohort are less likely to still have dependent children and are likely to view legislature changes as being more than adequate given the work/life issues they faced when they were younger. The descriptive findings from the sample largely match our expectations. Of those who agreed that FF practices had been implemented effectively, 51 per cent were aged 60 or over. Less than 20 per cent disagreed. Of all those legislators aged 60 or over, just shy of 80 per cent perceived the introduction of FF practices across the two legislatures had been successful. One female MSP interviewee reflected that, ‘the fact that we have voting at 5 o’clock makes it a much more family friendly institution and people that in the main, although there are exceptions, can get home for an evening with their family.’

*Does the distance between the legislature and their constituency affect legislators’ perceptions of the effectiveness of family-friendly policies?*

Finally, we consider the effect of constituency location on legislator satisfaction with FF working practices. Across both legislatures, there are differences between those who travel longer and shorter distances. From our overall sample, 46 per cent of those who agreed that FF practices had been successfully implemented had a longer distance to travel than the

median legislator travel distance. But 56 per cent of those who disagreed lived a longer distance away from the legislature. Of those legislators in the sample who commuted larger distances to either of the two legislatures, just above half (53.1 per cent) believed that FF policies had been effective. However, unsurprisingly given the different geographies of Wales and Scotland, there are differences between the two legislatures. In terms of whether the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) has successfully implemented FF working hours, 72.2 per cent of MSPs who live longer distances than median distance from the legislature still agree compared to just 28.6 per cent of their Welsh counterparts. This is most likely a product of the three-day week that the Parliament operates. As noted above, debates surrounding the sitting hours of legislatures often focus on the fact that long sitting hours packed into fewer days is perhaps more convenient for those who live further from the legislature than those who live close by (Committee 2012). In 2012, the Scottish Parliament introduced such a three-day week.<sup>xix</sup>

Despite the Welsh Assembly operating a similar system (three days of sitting with Mondays reserved for Committee sessions), AMs who travel longer distances than the median are less satisfied with FF provisions and stress that their legislature is less sympathetic to work-life balance than their Scottish colleagues in similar situations. Such sentiments were clear in our interviews, with one woman AM whose constituency was in North Wales stating that ‘family friendly is a term used and not understood...it’s family friendly in the sense that you can work a long batch on Tuesday and know you can definitely go back to the constituency on Thursday. I think it’s termed as being FF, but actually FF is only FF for those who live close to the Assembly.’ Similarly, a male AM based in South Wales agreed that ‘most of us, apart from the North Wales Members are able to go back to our families at nights: that helps. North Wales members are down here, what, two or three nights a week - that isn’t so family

friendly.’ However, despite their overall greater satisfaction, the MSPs we interviewed highlighted similar issues to their Welsh counterparts. One woman MSP elected from a constituency in West Scotland noted that ‘in theory I can go home every night. My colleagues in Aberdeen couldn’t do that and my colleagues in Skye certainly couldn’t do that’.

The source of this cross-legislature variation in satisfaction is unclear. It is potentially, again, a reflection of recent shifts in the Assembly’s role, with AMs likely to have to put in extra hours now that the Assembly has greater legislative powers, and a resultant decline in adherence to FF working practices. Additionally, but harder to measure and unaddressed in our research design, this may relate to institutional culture and the way that AMs with distant constituencies are treated relative to their colleagues in similar positions in the Scottish Parliament. Such a line of enquiry may prove fruitful for future research.

#### *Modelling legislator satisfaction with family-friendly practices*

Building on the descriptive findings, we employ an ordinal logistic regression model to test whether the hypothesised relationships outlined earlier explain the variation in satisfaction with FF working practices. For the purposes of model parsimony, we include four predictor variables – parenthood, sex, age 60 and above and distance from constituency to legislature. We also include a dummy variable for Scotland on the expectation that there will be no significant differences in satisfaction with FF working practises between members of the two legislatures. Given our small sample size (and statistical issues such as a lack of power) and availability of data, we focus solely on these variables and do not include additional controls or any interaction effects. Despite these limitations, the model provides a great deal of insight into the relative impact of our key variables of interest.

## Insert Table 2

Table 2 contains the results of the ordinal logistic regression analysis. Three of the four key variables perform largely as expected with coefficients statistically significant and properly signed. Firstly, sex is clearly important. Women legislators are significantly less likely to be satisfied with the implementation FF working hours than men. This holds when other variables are included and is significant at the 95% confidence level. Secondly, those legislators aged 60 and over are significantly more likely – at the 99% confidence level – to agree that FF practices have been successfully implemented than younger colleagues. Indeed, older legislators were 9.2 times more likely to strongly agree with the FF policies – compared with the other four categories combined, holding all the other variables in the model constant - than those below the age of 60. Thirdly, as hypothesised, those legislators who have a greater distance to travel to the legislature than the median MSP or AM are significantly less likely to be satisfied with the FF practices, even when the other variables are included in the model. And in line with our expectations, the Scotland dummy variable was insignificant. So while sex, being an older politician and those legislators with a closer commuting distance to the legislature are all significant determinants of legislator satisfaction with FF practices, parenthood, measuring whether the legislator has children of dependent age, is not. This finding appears to be robust. There is no significant bivariate relationship and the variable is not significant if the overall sample is split by legislature (Wales and Scotland). Moreover, there is little evidence of multicollinearity.<sup>xx</sup> Although we present this ordinal logistic model with the caveats outlined above, this suggests that variation in legislator satisfaction with FF practice is not as dependent on the experiences of parents as might have been assumed.<sup>xxi</sup> It is

clear that non-professional responsibilities outside of being a parent need to be considered in discussions of FF working practices.

## **Conclusion**

This article has presented a unique and original investigation of legislator satisfaction with FF working practices. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, we presented preliminary descriptive evidence of the ways in which legislator experiences of, and satisfaction with, FF working practices differ dependent on whether or not they have children of dependent age, their sex, age, and the distance between their constituency and the legislature in which they sit. We modelled the relative impact of these four variables and tested whether these hypothesised relationships held on legislator satisfaction with the efforts made by their institutions to implement FF working hours. Our findings suggest significant divisions along the lines of sex, age of legislator and legislature-constituency distance. Conversely, we found no evidence that being a parent with children of dependent age mattered, implying that FF practices need to move beyond just focusing on the parent-child care relationship and address broader issues relating to gendered divisions of care and domestic labour as well as spatial variations in this. Methodologically, this acknowledgement that FF practice means different things to different people could be reflected in its empirical treatment. For instance, there is no clear consensus on how to measure FF practice as it contains multiple facets that are either unrecorded or not integrated into a single convenient database. Thus for future research, we would advocate combining as many possible sources of information about FF practices to estimate an underlying (or latent) unobserved variable for more in-depth evaluation. Put simply, thinking about FF practice as a latent concept might allow for less rigid categorisation of such practices on the part of researchers and provide a more rounded

understanding of their influences on outcomes.<sup>xxii</sup> Additionally, conceptualising the FF practices themselves as mediators of dependent variables such as employee satisfaction or work-life balance might provide a greater insight into their overall impact. Finally, undertaking a greater number of interviews than we were able to as part of the present study would allow for more understanding of the phenomenal aspects of combining family life and political life.

We hope that our findings will result in similar research taking place around the globe. From the present study, we have identified a number of issues that scholars should consider in future assessments of FF working practices implemented in a legislature, old or new. Firstly, the level commitment to FF working practices should be addressed in much more depth. Is this piecemeal, such as the installation of a crèche, or is it part of a broader commitment to equality by the institution (such as the SED of the Welsh Assembly)? Research from non-political occupations has shown that an overall shift in organizational culture in favour of FF practice is contingent on a wider sense of entitlement by those benefiting from FF policies and changes to broader organizational priorities (Lewis 1997). Secondly, is the commitment under possible threat from changes to the powers and function of the legislature in question, or indeed the political context in which it exists? For example, a recent crèche installed at the Houses of Parliament in the UK has come under fire as being an unnecessary extravagant at a time of economic austerity.<sup>xxiii</sup> Thirdly, as we have demonstrated above, parents and children should constitute a part, but not all, of the focus of FF working practices. It is crucial that FF practices do not isolate certain groups, either by sex, the nature of their caring duties, or their geographic location. It is easy to anticipate the difficulties, for example, in implementing FF policies in an institution representing a significantly larger geographical unit than the ones addressed in the present study, such as the European Parliament.



We have shown that although effective in some cases, FF practice as seen in the devolved legislatures of Scotland and Wales has not eliminated the sense of compromise faced by many politicians – compromise between work and leisure, between occupational and domestic obligations, and between different areas of the country. Scholars and practitioners alike should consider ways in which to develop new solutions to reduce these limiting factors. Finally, future research in gender and politics should consider the role of FF practices in shaping the political context. For example, are women more likely to become political candidates for legislatures where FF working practices are in place (Lawless and Fox 2010; Lawless 2012)? Similarly, are women politicians in legislatures with FF practice emboldened to pursue more transformative types of substantive representation? We should also consider how the presence of FF working practices may affect political parties' candidate selection processes, arguably removing long-held traditional rationales regarding women's inability to combine domestic and political life (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Childs and Cowley 2011). On a related note, in light of our findings, scholars might consider the extent to which any FF policies or practice change underlying non-formal institutional norms – are any changes merely surface-level (Raymond et al. 2014)? Such an enquiry would fit well with discursive or post-structural institutionalist analysis of non-formal institutions. To what extent do implicit expectations regarding politicians (lack of) work-life balance persist as a non-formal institution within political life despite formal interventions, and how are these affected by further formal institutional changes such as increases in the law-making powers it holds (Moon 2013; Bacchi and Rönnblom 2014)? These are all questions of interest to scholars of gender and politics and more broadly to those interested in the effective functioning of democratic institutions.

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<sup>i</sup> The UK Office for National Statistics finds that ‘Over the past 40 years there has been a rise in the percentage of women aged 16 to 64 in employment and a fall in the percentage of men. In April to June 2013 around 67% of women aged 16 to 64 were in work, an increase from 53% in 1971. For men the percentage fell to 76% in 2013 from 92% in 1971’ (2013, p.1).

<sup>ii</sup> These are two rare examples of academic work that discusses family-friendly practices in political institutions. We can find no studies of specific institutions with such policies akin to the present study we discuss here.

<sup>iii</sup> We thank one of the reviewers for this observation.

<sup>iv</sup> For a concise and informative collection of papers on this topic, we direct readers to the 2010 (Volume 16, Issue 3) special issue of the *Journal of Legislative Studies* on Ceremony and Ritual in Parliament.

<sup>v</sup> We are indebted to one of the anonymous reviewers for the observation that future research in this area should consider other groups when analysing the impact of FF practice on life in political institutions, for example same-sex couples with children. It is highly likely that they will face similar, if not identical, issues to heterosexual couples.

<sup>vi</sup> We thank one of the anonymous reviewers for the observation that this lack of attention could also reflect the fact that such practices are taken for granted in certain parts of the world, particularly the Scandinavian countries which have ‘mainstreamed’ such policies with relative success. Future research in this area should consider this distinction between new and old legislatures in order to compare and contrast the experiences of implementing and sustaining FF practice across both.

<sup>vii</sup> The official statement announcing this can be viewed here - <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/offices/commons/house-of-commons-commission/hccpressstatement151209/> last accessed 2014-07-27.

<sup>viii</sup> See [https://www.cipd.co.uk/binaries/5790%20Flexible%20Working%20SR%20\(WEB2\).pdf](https://www.cipd.co.uk/binaries/5790%20Flexible%20Working%20SR%20(WEB2).pdf)

<sup>ix</sup> Amendments to the powers of the Scottish Parliament are detailed within Schedule 5 of the original Government of Scotland Act (1998) and were altered in 2012. More information can be found at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/46/schedule/5>. The powers of the Welsh Assembly were altered by a new Government of Wales Act (2006) which can be found at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/32/contents>.

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<sup>x</sup> The actual response rate was 35.6% but this included respondents who did not complete the whole survey including the question on satisfaction with the implementation of FF policies. The response rate was higher among members of the Welsh Assembly (46.7%) than the Scottish Parliament (29%).

<sup>xi</sup> Self-selection and non-response bias are both potential problems that can affect surveys. A brief glance at the descriptive statistics (in terms of gender/age/parenthood) suggests that we have a cross-section of responses that largely coincides with the social make-up of the two legislatures. We have run only preliminary two-step (Heckman type) models on the data for completeness but the significant effects largely coincide with the results of the ordinal regression shown later in the paper. However, this comes with obvious caveats given the sample size and the statistical issues which arise from a more complex procedure. Even though our tests and descriptive statistics suggest that our sample data is broadly representative, like most surveys, it remains prudent to bear in mind any potential issues of self-selection when considering the findings.

<sup>xii</sup> 34.8% of the sitting members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) are women. Of those who responded from the Scottish Parliament, 38.9% were women. In the Welsh Assembly, the figure is 40%. In our sample, 50% of respondents from the Welsh Assembly were women.

<sup>xiii</sup> Of the other parties, three of the five Liberal Democrats in the Welsh Assembly responded to the survey but we received no responses from the five MSPs. One of the two Scottish Green legislators responded as did the independent member in the Scottish Parliament.

<sup>xiv</sup> We sought interviews with men and women from all of the parties represented in the two institutions. Unfortunately, an internal political scandal within the Conservative party in the Welsh Assembly meant that planned interviews with Conservative AMs were cancelled at short notice and could not be rescheduled.

<sup>xv</sup> For this dependent variable, it is coded as follows: strongly disagree = 1; disagree = 2; neither agree nor disagree = 3; agree = 4; strongly agree = 5.

<sup>xvi</sup> To compute distance of travel between constituency and legislature, we calculated the distance between the postcode of the legislator's constituency office and the postcode of the legislature (either the Welsh Assembly or Scottish Parliament). An obvious objection to this measure is that a legislator may not live in the same place as their constituency office, or indeed not live in their constituency at all. This is true, but in the absence of data on their place of residence, we assume that a legislator is likely to have to make a journey between these two locations with some regularity. It is also likely, particularly for those legislators representing constituencies or regions some distance from the legislature, that their family and/or home will be based there rather than in the city of the legislature. We utilised Google Maps (<http://maps.google.com>) to measure distance.

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<sup>xvii</sup> For more information, see for example <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-politics-12648649> and <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/11/contents/enacted> last accessed 2014-07-27.

<sup>xviii</sup> An exception to the lower levels of satisfaction expressed by legislators who are parents is with regard to a related question on whether there needs to be greater childcare provision. Perhaps counterintuitively, parents are less likely than non-parents (19 and 81 per cent, respectively) to agree. One possible explanation for this might be a lack of awareness of what is *already* available on the part of non-parents (i.e. they have not themselves used the services so are unaware of their extensiveness). Alternatively, it could be the case that parents feel that increased childcare simply wouldn't actually improve their work-life balance, that the source of this imbalance lies elsewhere (perhaps in terms of time management), and as such, do not have such great enthusiasm for an increased in provision.

<sup>xix</sup> Details of this are available from <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/newsandmediacentre/54008.aspx> last accessed 2014-07-27.

<sup>xx</sup> For brevity, we re-ran the models separately for Wales and Scotland. Of course, the sample sizes are much smaller so the results should be treated with caution, nonetheless the three significant variables in the combined model (sex, age 60 and above, distance) were also significant when modeled separately by legislature. We would expect this given the insignificance of the Scotland dummy variable. There is also no evidence of multicollinearity as examined through the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and Tolerance statistics (TI). The bivariate relationships between sex, distance, age 60 plus and the outcome were all significant (and in the same direction as the multivariate analysis) adding to the robustness of the findings.

<sup>xxi</sup> It is possible that this reflects the fact that politicians who are parents of dependent children have already 'settled' this conflict outside of the working environment. As such, they may not be looking to their place of work, the legislature, to resolve any tension in this area. We are indebted to one of the anonymous reviewers for this observation.

<sup>xxii</sup> This is assuming that the different items that make up the latent variable 'FF practice' are correlated with each other. This would have to be examined, which in itself would be of value to the literature.

<sup>xxiii</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2098024/Parliamentary-creche-costing-34-000-child-branded-waste-money-nearly-thirds-empty.html> last accessed 2014-07-27.

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## Tables

**Table 1: Key ‘Family Friendly’ Policies Implemented by the Legislatures**

<b>Key ‘Family Friendly’ Policies</b>
Parental Leave
Flexible working patterns – school term-time, part time etc
Enhanced Maternity/Paternity/Adoption leave/Pay arrangements
Carers’ Policy
Special Leave arrangements
Salary sacrifice for childcare vouchers
Crèche for visitors

**Table 2: Ordinal Logistic Regression: Key Predictors of Legislators’ Perceptions of the Implementation of ‘Family Friendly’ Practises**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Family Friendly</b>	
	$\beta$	SE
Sex (Woman)	-1.36*	0.60
Parenthood	-0.73	0.75
Distance	-0.06*	0.03
Age of Legislator (60+)	2.22**	0.54
Scotland (dummy)	0.70	0.60
<i>Cut 1</i>	-3.25	0.72
<i>Cut 2</i>	-0.81	0.60
<i>Cut 3</i>	-0.13	0.56
<i>Cut 4</i>	5.31	1.13
<b>Model Diagnostics</b>		
Log likelihood	-60.72	
LR Chi-Square	27.74**	
McFadden R <sup>2</sup>	0.18	
AIC	139.43	
N	64	

\*\*Significant at the <0.01 level; \*<0.05 level;

## Figures

**Figure 1: Descriptive Overview of Legislators' Satisfaction with the Implementation of FF Practices across the Devolved Legislatures (Sample N = 64)**

